



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Most Holy Trinity | Year C



Andrej Rublev. Angels at Mamre: Trinity



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

God of mercy,

You wash away our sins in water,

You give us new birth in the Spirit,

And redeem us in the blood of Christ.

As we celebrate Christ's resurrection

Increase our awareness of these blessings,

And renew your gift of life within us.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

One God forever and ever.

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours, ICEL, Catholic Book, New York, 452]

Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity segues us back into Ordinary Time. Trinity Sunday is one of the four solemnities of the Lord during Ordinary Time. It is called an “idea feast.” An idea feast expresses focus on a particular truth or element of Christian teaching. Such feasts arose in response to some trial within or outside the church such as heresy. The four solemnities include Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christ, Sacred Heart and Christ the King.
- ▶ This feast arose over the centuries initially as a result of the Arian heresy that denied the divinity of Christ. With the divinity of Christ being threatened so was the doctrine of Trinity. By the year 1,000 this feast was in place and situated after the feast of Pentecost. (See Word and Worship Workbook, Year C, Mary Birmingham, Trinity Sunday: “liturgical context” for a more through treatment of this feast.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today’s liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today’s Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading: Proverbs 8:22-31

- ▶ Ancient sages were a treasured resource in antiquity; they inspired right and just living.
- ▶ Their honed discernment and meditation skills helped people live life to the fullest and find meaning in every day existence. They schooled the community in the proper way to live and be in the world.
- ▶ Gifted with wisdom, they taught about wisdom’s fruit in the lives of God’s faithful ones.
- ▶ They promoted obedience to the covenant and offered advice in how to live a balanced life.
- ▶ The sage was not interested in changing the world, just in helping people confront it and cope with it.
- ▶ The sage was at the center of the community; he was well aware of what was going on in its life.
- ▶ The sage was considered a leader of the community. He understood life and people’s response to it—he offered the wisdom and guidance to maneuver through it.
- ▶ The wisdom movement left a lasting legacy in Hebrew life, thought and prayer. Three books of the Bible were devoted to its principles and many other books were influenced by its thought.
- ▶ Wisdom literature offered advice about how to live a well-organized life, how to control one’s emotions and maintain healthy relationships.
- ▶ Wisdom literature recognized that good people often experience hardship and

suffering.

- ▶ The sage was not concerned with salvation history as were the priests and prophets. The sage's focus was the individual. He was more concerned with helping the individual find meaning through a well-disciplined life.
- ▶ Even though much is attributed to Solomon, he was not the author of wisdom literature. He did, however, influence it.
- ▶ Today's passage personifies wisdom. The "person" is called *Lady Wisdom*. She invites people to attain prudence.
- ▶ Lady Wisdom understands herself to be an active participant in the God's creation.
- ▶ Lady Wisdom prefigures the theology of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Scripture does not specifically articulate a doctrine of Trinity but it echoes it. "God is personified throughout as Word (dabar), Spirit (ruah), Wisdom (hokmah), and presence (shekinah)" (Mary Birmingham, Word and Worship Workbook, Year C, Trinity Sunday).



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Why is the wisdom literature still relevant for our contemporary culture?
- ▶ What is wisdom and why do we need it?
- ▶ Where in your life is Lady Wisdom needed? What can she offer you at this time in your life?
- ▶ Who is the wisest person you know and why did you choose that person as an example of wisdom?
- ▶ In what way does this reading from Proverbs reveal the Trinity?
- ▶ What is the good news in this reading?

Second Reading: Romans 5: 1-5

- ▶ Paul's thesis is clear. If disciples wish to become transformed they must embrace the message of the Gospel—the paschal Mystery of Christ. In so doing, the Spirit of God will begin the process of change.
- ▶ Paul challenges rigid legalism and the belief that people could earn their own salvation.
- ▶ Paul insists that the Christian Gospel is the fulfillment of all the works of salvation begun by God in the Old Testament since the creation of the world.
- ▶ Jesus died once and for all humanity in an act of unmerited, completely gratuitous love.
- ▶ For so great a gift one can do no less than offer himself or herself completely to

God—to submit to God’s will in all things.

- ▶ Human beings are justified by their faith in God that automatically leads to action--to works. One can do no less than accomplish good works in light of the great gift of salvation so freely offered.
- ▶ Paul felt certain urgency in his message. He was afraid that Jewish theology of merited grace was so ingrained in their hearts that the people would never accept forgiveness.
- ▶ Paul’s letter, often called “Paul’s Gospel”, is a brilliant treatise on his theology of Paschal Mystery—the life, death and resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit of Christ.
- ▶ Paul insists that we are all saved through faith in Christ. God’s grace is ours through the power of Christ crucified and risen.
- ▶ The word “access” can mean safe harbor. Paul sought to strengthen and encourage a church that was experiencing persecution and tension between other religious factions. Paul’s struggle with the Judaizers made him sympathetic to their plight and he encouraged them to stand firm and be strong in the face of adversity.
- ▶ Above all Paul preached about the free, unmerited gift of God’s grace and salvation given to us through the sacrifice of Christ. It is our most precious treasure.
- ▶ Paul’s belief in the power of Christ’s Spirit and in the nature of God would be the basis for a firm articulation of the doctrine of Trinity.
- ▶ One only has the power to withstand persecution and onslaught through the power of the Triune God.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, have you been aware of God’s power in your life to strengthen you in times of adversity?
- ▶ Where in your life right now, is God’s power most needed?
- ▶ How do you feel about Paul’s insistence that grace and salvation are utterly free and unmerited?
- ▶ Is there still a part of you that feels you must somehow have to earn it? How does that thinking manifest itself? What does Paul have to say to you about such thinking? What are the implications for your life?
- ▶ If you truly believed that grace and salvation is completely unmerited, how might that impact the way you live your everyday life?

:Gospel John 16, 12-15

- ▶ Jesus prepares his disciples for his pending death and for the mission they will continue after his death.
- ▶ Today's Gospel amazingly reveals the mystery of the Trinity: "All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he [the Spirit of truth] will take what is mine and declare it to you." While not explicitly stated, it is nonetheless strikingly implicit.
- ▶ Today we hear of the role of the Spirit in the work that is to go forward.
- ▶ Jesus warned them about what he was about to endure. They were terrified. He was the source of their unity and their community. What would they do in his absence? He was their hope and their assurance.
- ▶ Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with them and to strengthen them—to be his presence in their midst.
- ▶ They would come to understand the Spirit as Jesus' risen and exalted presence.
- ▶ The Paraclete—the one who gives witness—would be sent to strengthen them to persevere in the midst of persecution. The Paraclete (much like a prosecuting attorney) will go before them to convict the world of the truth of the Christian kerygma.
- ▶ Jesus knew a future day was coming when they would better understand all that he had taught them. They were now slow to understand.
- ▶ The Spirit would eventually reveal the fullness of the Christ event to them.
- ▶ The Spirit would give them the discernment necessary to confront the onslaught of persecution and heresy. They would stand firm.
- ▶ Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with his Church until the end of the age.
- ▶ The Spirit was poured forth upon the earth at Calvary when water and blood flowed from the side of Jesus. Water was a sign of baptism and a sign of the Spirit being poured out to a world desperate for God's ongoing presence. Blood was a sign of Christ's continued presence in the Eucharist.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What does it mean to you that God exists as three in one Persons?
- ▶ What is your understanding of the Trinity as revealed in this Gospel?
- ▶ How might you relate what Jesus tells his disciples the Spirit will do in their lives to your life today?
- ▶ Do you believe that you have the same access to the Triune God that they did?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that God is active, powerful and leading you as he led those first disciples?

- ▶ What do you need from the Holy Spirit if you are really to go forth as Jesus commanded? What are some ways that you can follow Jesus' command in your own environment?
- ▶ What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. Lady Wisdom breathes upon us and we are transformed more fully into God's image. I am particularly touched by the image of Lady Wisdom and her generative ability to create and re-create. I look at the role of Lady Wisdom over the years and I see a slow, steady transformation in my life. The extent to which I have yielded to her wisdom is the extent to which I have grown.

I like the image of a ship with its rudder. Years ago I responded to the world with a great deal of emotion. Things affected me deeply and I would become easily reactive to situations. I used to be teased that I could cry at Mickey Mouse cartoons and moments later blow off steam in a fit of bad temper.

The work of Lady Wisdom in my life over the years---the steady slow growth associated with her work---has tempered those emotions. I see more balance in my life. I am steady at the helm in the face of crisis. I have come to understand that I am called to change what I can when it comes to life's circumstances, accept what I cannot change and pray for Lady Wisdom to let me know the difference.

#2. I am very aware of God's power to strengthen me in times of adversity---whether that adversity comes from my witness to Christ or from life's everyday tensions, struggles and sorrows. God has always strengthened us to endure.

I remember one minor event. Many years ago I had taken a new position in a new city. The transition was very difficult. Some people in the organization had not adjusted to the new person on board and the early days were rough. Several people in particular made things very difficult for me.

A confrontation was brewing and even though I am not one that thrives on it or even wants to be near it, I was rehearsing my retorts in my head so I would be sure and not lose the upper hand in the argument I was sure was brewing. Someone alerted me that confrontation with the two most vocal people was immanent. I anticipated an ugly scene.

I stopped my rehearsing and simply began to pray for the strength to be an agent of reconciliation rather than continued animosity, friction and conflict. As the confrontation began I felt a small stirring deep within myself. The passage came to mind in Scripture in which we are promised that we should not worry about what we should say in such situations, as God would give us the words we need.

Indeed that is what I experienced---a profound sense of God's presence. The words of wisdom that flowed from me came from somewhere deep within. My temptation and very human desire was to reciprocate anger with anger, sarcasm with sarcasm. Yet, a voice of peace and reconciliation came forth from me that surprised even me as I spoke. That day was a turning point. The reconciling power of God changed minds and hearts---

especially mine. I learned a powerful lesson. God will guide us through the rough waters of life if we yield to his power and presence in our lives.

#3. We sometimes look at the Gospel and marvel at what those first disciples experienced. Yet through eyes of faith we too have access to what they experienced. We too are strengthened by God's power to go out and proclaim God's love to the world. We too are called to embrace the Paschal Mystery in our lives, take up our cross and offer our lives for God's ongoing plan of redemption in the world.

Long ago I came to the realization that my ministry—my apostolic work to which I am called—will be as effective as my willingness to embrace the cross and resurrection of Christ in my life.

No matter what happens in my life I hope for the strength to offer my life and the situation up for the work of redemption I am privileged to share with Christ.

When we offer the pain in our lives for others we are given a tiny glimpse of Jesus' own sacrifice for us.

In dealing with my very sick child I offer the struggle our family endures up for other families who do not have the support system I have, who wander aimlessly wondering where God is in the midst of the insanity they endure day after day.

I wish we never had had to endure this suffering in our family. But we do. I can find meaning in the midst of it and am very aware that it is Christ—the power of His Spirit and the consoling love of the Father that keeps us from losing our way in the midst of a very difficult situation.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Salvation
Holy Spirit
Evangelization
Baptism
The Church and Ecclesiology

Church Structure
Sacraments
Revelation I or II
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SALVATION

Jesus prepares his disciples for his absence and for the saving mission they will take up after his death. Today's Gospel gives us a glimpse of the salvation God planned for the world since the beginning of time that comes to fulfillment in the Christ event. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal teaching regarding SALVATION.

EVANGELIZATION

Jesus reminds his disciples that the Spirit will go with them to accomplish the saving mission they will continue after his death. We are called to go forth and share what Jesus has given us with those still asleep to his life within. Thus, the focus of today's doctrinal session will be what the Church teaches us about EVANGELIZATION.

HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus reminds his disciples that he will send the Paraclete in his absence. His Spirit will guide and strengthen the disciples and the Christian community after Jesus' death. Thus, today, the doctrinal focus will be the Holy Spirit.

BAPTISM

Jesus reminds his disciples that they will go forth to continue his saving mission in the world. They are therefore to go out and baptize all nations in Christ's name through the power of the Triune God. Baptism gives us access to Christ's ongoing life in the world---presence in absence. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the sacrament of baptism.

CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Jesus invites his disciples into union with his Father and with one another. He promises to be with the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is commissioned to go forth. Today we will focus on the Church and what we mean by Ecclesiology.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

Jesus invites his disciples into union with his Father and with one another. He promises to be with the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is commissioned to go forth. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the structure of the Church.

SACRAMENTS

Jesus is present to us in the sacraments. Jesus promises to send his Spirit to go forth with his community of believers as they establish the reign of God in the world. We are strengthened to go forth through our participation in the sacraments. Christ's presence and union continues through the generations in the sacraments. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

REVELATION Part I or II

What better time is there than a feast devoted to the Triune God to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? Today's session will focus on God's revelation.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.